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SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER RAMOS HORTA'S LATEST VIEWS

REF: DILI 368

DILI 00000372 001.2 OF 002

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In several conversations with Ambassador and Emboffs following his swearing in as East Timor's new Prime Minister, Jose Ramos Horta shared his views on some issues facing his government. Among the subjects addressed were: his delicate working relationship with the Fretilin party; his plan to establish a civil society council and a strategic planning group to advise his government; his intention to withdraw the criminal defamation portion of the penal code and to provide support to media development; his thoughts on the election law currently under review; and his recommendations regarding the the operational security and police training components of the next UN mission. Although Ramos-Horta has a clear vision of what needs to be done to turn around the fragile political situation, it remains to be seen to what extent this legendary international negotiator will prevail in moving hard-line Fretilin members to a more practical and inclusive approach to governance. End summary.

Working with Fretilin

¶2. (SBU) One of the key challenges facing Ramos Horta in the coming weeks and months will be working with the ruling Fretilin party whose representatives have clearly indicated that they consider this a Fretilin government bound to implement the party's policies. In a conversation with Ambassador Rees immediately following his swearing in, Ramos Horta noted that he would have liked to have made many more changes to the composition of the cabinet but that the party "remains in control of cabinet appointments-it's only fair, they still have the majority in Parliament." (See reftel for discussion of cabinet appointments.) However, in the same conversation he noted adamantly that "my judgment is final" on policy decisions, although he will be in regular discussions with Fretilin's Political Committee.

Plans for civil society council and strategic planning group

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13. (SBU) Ramos Horta relayed to us his plans to establish two bodies to assist in advising and the government and shaping future policy development. First, he wants to establish a civil society council, comprising representatives of the Catholic Church, non-governmental organizations, the media, and other civil society organizations. The role of the council would be to review and advise on all major government decisions, with particular emphasis on decisions with wide social impact. In describing this concept, Ramos Horta remarked that civil society has felt shut out of government deliberations and the council would begin to remedy this complaint. A second body that he plans to establish is a strategic planning group. His explanation of the precise function of this group remains somewhat general at this time, but the overall idea is to hire a group of consultants who could provide policy and public outreach direction, particularly on economic development issues.

Criminal defamation to be withdrawn from penal code; government support of media development

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14. (SBU) In several conversations Ramos Horta has stated his unambiguous intent to resubmit the penal code with the sections criminalizing defamation withdrawn. He noted that he might support criminalizing defamation if East Timor, and especially its media sector, were significantly more developed. However, he noted that criminal defamation is particularly inappropriate for the current stage of media development. In this vein, Ramos Horta spoke of his intent to provide greater material support to media organizations if possible within the budget. Examples of the kinds of support that might be included were salary subsidies and support to provide for free distribution of newspapers around the country. He also wants to start a monthly government "lift-out" section in papers to educate the public about government policies while providing additional support to the papers. Finally, he stated that there should be a new law stipulating that the government cannot financially punish

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papers, for example by withdrawing advertising, because of differences in opinion.

Election law

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15. (SBU) On the subject of the election law, a draft of which was produced by the Alkatiri government and is currently under review by Parliament, Ramos Horta stated that he will insist on broad consultations. While he expressed equanimity regarding the resubmission of the Alkatiri government's version by the Fretelin bench in Parliament, he noted that he has some specific disagreements with the contents that "must be worked out." In particular, he noted the current draft law's provisions for providing funding support to parties based on the proportion of seats they have in Parliament. He stated that while there could be some proportionality in this support, it should not be so directly proportional as this would clearly unfairly benefit the majority Fretelin party. His suggested alternative is to either give an equal amount to each party, or to have a proportional system with a set minimum and maximum to reduce the discrepancy between parties.

The next UN mission

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16. (SBU) In discussing his current views of the next UN mission, Ramos Horta emphasized that he still wants at least one battalion of Peace Keepers in addition to the policing operation. While noting that Peace Keepers were not strictly necessary for day-to-day security needs, he believes that the symbolism would be very important and that they would provide a potentially vital rapid reaction back up capability. On the policing operation, he still believes that it will be necessary to have around 1,000 on the ground. He emphasized that he wants the Portuguese National Republican Guard (GNR) to play as big a role as possible in this operation. He said that the population like and respect the GNR and believe they are the most effective

international police operating here. He also believes there is a role for the GNR in police training, noting that the Australian training program has been good but that the GNR have also been working on training plans and could make a valuable contribution.

¶7. (SBU) Separately, Ramos Horta expressed to the Ambassador that he hopes that Ian Martin will be the next SRSG, remarking that the current SRSG Sukehiro Hasegawa "has experience in development but not in politics."

¶8. (SBU) Comment: Under the Constitution the Prime Minister merely "proposes" cabinet members and the President has discretion about whether to "appoint." It seems unlikely that the Fretolin inner circle would have agreed to the appointment of Fretolin reformer Jose Luis Guterres as Foreign Minister if they had as much control as Ramos-Horta has suggested. However, other changes and retentions in the Cabinet, such as the decision not to abolish the five regional Secretary of State positions suggest that Ramos-Horta deferred to the Fretolin leadership except when he had a particularly strong opinion. Ramos-Horta's belief that he, not the Fretolin committee, has ultimate authority over matters of policy is notable. His decision to reintroduce the penal code without the controversial criminal defamation provision, a pet project of former Prime Minister Alkatiri, suggests that he really means this. An even more important test of Ramos-Horta's asserted authority over policy will be whether he succeeds in changing the election law to meet his own specifications, which conform closely to those of United Nations experts, opposition parties, and civil society, but not very closely to the views of Fretolin leadership. Never so much as now has East Timor's ability to move forward as a truly participatory democracy depended on Ramos-Horta's legendary negotiating skills.

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